

Fenner Street

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THE BLACK BUICK came to a halt at the foot of Fenner Street. The man behind the wheel sat smoking a cigarette until Officer Fogarty passed out of sight down Nelson Avenue hill.

The door swung open, and the man that emerged from the Buick was an interesting study. His clothes did not go with his face. He was a big man who did justice to the obviously well-tailored brown suit, but his face was cold and expressionless. His eyes were jet black orbs, peering out from under the large brimmed hat.

He gave another swift glance in the direction Officer Fogarty had disappeared, and proceeded up the street with a determined gait. He struggled through groups of women buying produce from the market carts. A rummy asked him for a dime and was ignored. There were an ice cream vendor short-measuring a couple of kids and the inevitable crowd surrounding the Ginny and his playful monk. Three boys jostled against him in their mad flight down the street. They had stolen some wire-spoked wheels from Max Colbert's Junk Yard, and old man Colbert was in hard pursuit.

As he approached the front of Giofannis' Delicatessen, a little, dark eyed girl sat on the pavement playing jacks by herself. She had a large steel brace on her left leg.

He glared at her "Hi, Mister," grunted, and started through the door.

"Hey, Mister!"

He stopped abruptly, then turned around. "Wot ya want?"

"My ball please."

"Wot about it?"

"It rolled out there in the street."

"Git it yaself!" he said, then started through the door.

"But, Mister."

Again he turned around. "Wot?"

"I can't get my ball."

"How come?"

"I can't walk."

"Oh!" he said as he noticed her brace. He hesitated, then walked out into the street, picked up the ball, and returned it to the kid. "Here."

"Gee, thanks, Mister."

"Wot's yer name?"

"Nina, Nina Giofannis."

"Yer ol' man own this store?"

"Unhuh, why?"

"Nottin', no reason at all."

"You wanna see my daddy?"

"You talk too much, kid. How comes yer Ma lets ya play out here in a street wit dat bum leg?"

"Oh I haven't any mother any more, she's in heaven. Just Daddy 'n me now. You believe in heaven, Mister?"

"You talk too much, kid."

"I guess maybe I have to do somethin', Mister, I can't play hop-sotch like the rest of the kids."

"Ya can't walk none at all?"

"Oh sure, I get around some on my crutches, only right now daddy has 'em down at Mr. Donovan's shop. He's puttin' them rubber what-ya-call-its on the bottoms, so I won't slip on the tenement house steps when it's wet out."

"Ya gab a lot, don't ya, kid?"

"That's what daddy says. Ya know, Mister, I'll bet you come down here to get some of our cheesecake. Mrs. Garabaldi says we've got the best cheesecake on the whole waterfront. You just go right on in, Mister. Daddy's gone, but Nickey'll wait on you."

He took his hand slowly from the door knob, pulled the wallet from his inside coat pocket, crumpled a bill, and dropped it into the crippled kid's lap. "Buy yerself a new rubber ball, kid." He turned and walked away.

"Hey, Mister, this is a *five* dollar bill.—Hey, Mister"

Silently he worked his way back down Fenner Street to the parked Buick.